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Viewing cable 08SANJOSE530, COSTA RICA REQUESTS IMMEDIATE MARITIME

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- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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| Reference ID | Created | Released | Classification | Origin |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 08SANJOSE530 | 2008-06-18 17:51 | 2011-08-30 01:44 | CONFIDENTIAL | Embassy San Jose |

Appears in these articles:

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN JOSE 000530

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR WHA/CEN, WHA/PPC AND INL/LP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/13/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [MASS](#) [MCAP](#) [PINS](#) [SNAR](#) [CS](#)

SUBJECT: COSTA RICA REQUESTS IMMEDIATE MARITIME
INTERDICTION ASSISTANCE

REF: A. STATE 03027

B. 07 SAN JOSE 2074

C. SAN JOSE 287

Classified By: ADCM David E. Henifin for reason 1.4 (b).

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SUMMARY
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1. (C) On June 12, Minister of Public Security Janina Del Vecchio told us that Costa Rica desperately needs security assistance, especially to reinvigorate the dilapidated Costa Rican Coast Guard (SNGC) to help fight narcotrafficking. She requested that all of the planned Merida Initiative funds for Costa Rica for FY2008 (\$4.3 million) be programmed to strengthen the SNGC by purchasing boats, engines, and other maintenance issues. Del Vecchio underscored that Costa Rica believes that it is not being treated fairly in comparison with other countries in the region, which are "not as close allies of the U.S. as Costa Rica." She alluded that the amount of assistance that Costa Rica would receive from Merida for the SNGC was insufficient.

2. (C) Del Vecchio was open, candid and strong in her presentation and requests. She was not griping, but vigorously describing Costa Rica's top needs. Del Vecchio told us her three main priorities for the next two years were: to control Costa Rica's territorial waters and borders with regards to drug traffickers; coordinate efforts between the police and local communities to combat crime; and to change the image of the police in the eyes of the general public. We realize that re-directing all of Costa Rica's FY2008 share of Merida funding (\$4.3 million) to make the SNGC operable and more effective is unlikely. However, we agree with Del Vecchio that the SNGC should receive as much assistance as possible as soon as possible. We stand ready to work with Washington colleagues to identify funding options for the SNGC. END SUMMARY.

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DEL VECCHIO: WE NEED HELP NOW
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3. (C) We planned to take advantage of Minister of Public Security (MPS) Janina Del Vecchio's visa renewal visit to the Embassy on June 12 to discuss ongoing/future joint cooperation programs, such as Costa Rica's imminent participation in the PANAMAX exercise and the imminent signing of a bilateral Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Search and Rescue (SAR) operations (Ref A). After a gracious opening session thanking the Ambassador and DCM for the continued, essential USG CN/law enforcement for Costa Rica, however, Del Vecchio quickly turned to her own agenda: frank and useful commentary on the Merida Initiative, the state of domestic security in the country, and the deplorable condition of the assets held by the SNGC.

4. (C) Del Vecchio emphasized that the SNGC needed to be strengthened in order to accomplish its interdiction mission, in particular by purchasing new boats and engines. She added that the SNGC lacked appropriate equipment in all areas in order to perform its counterdrug duties. She thus requested that the planned FY2008 Merida Initiative of \$4.3 million of support for Costa Rica be totally dedicated to fixing the SNGC.

5. (C) We explained that the final amount of Merida support for the SNGC in FY2008, currently scheduled to be \$1.975 million, could differ depending on Congressional actions and that it was unlikely that there would be any substantive changes in the amounts to be allocated for the SNGC. However, we pointed out that FY2009 was not that far off and the planned amount of \$3.8 million of SNGC support in that fiscal year could bring the total Merida support for the SNGC

to nearly \$5.8 million over a two-year period, a significant amount of assistance.

¶6. (C) Del Vecchio expressed her concern that Costa Rica's 12-mile territorial waters were not being patrolled appropriately, allowing drug traffickers to unloading their cargos easily, which were then picked up by local fishermen and stored in warehouses throughout the country. She also was worried that maritime seizures had decreased in the last few months, showing a change in the patterns and strategies used by the traffickers. We explained to Del Vecchio, that

in our best judgment, the main reason for the fall in seizures in Costa Rica's territorial waters was the fact that the SNGC did not have interceptor vessels, and that the existing, larger patrol boats could not go faster than 10 knots and did not have operable radars to safely conduct night operations.

¶7. (C) The GOCR believed, Del Vecchio underscored, that Costa Rica was not being treated fairly in comparison with other countries in the region, which were "not as close allies to the U.S. as Costa Rica." She argued that Costa Rica should be receiving as much assistance as other countries. Due to the fact that Del Vecchio is relatively new on the job, we reminded her that Costa Rica had been scheduled to receive more assistance in the past but had been blocked by ASPA sanctions for the past three years. For example, new engines had been purchased for Costa Rica's 105-foot flagship patrol boat, but had to be returned because of the sanctions.

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THE SCOURGE OF CRACK COCAINE
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¶8. (SBU) Repeating a theme echoed earlier this year by Vice President Laura Chinchilla (Ref C), Del Vecchio underlined that the distribution and use of crack cocaine was her number one domestic drug concern. She requested USG assistance to train Costa Rican police to help combat the scourge of crack. (NOTE: We have discussed this topic with Del Vecchio before and are exploring several assistance options. END NOTE.)

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COMMENT
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¶9. (C) Del Vecchio's increased engagement on security issues since her assumption of duties in mid-April is an encouraging sign and shows that she is beginning to listen to the concerns of many of her operational commanders responsible for counternarcotics. Up to now, she had little substantive communication with these "front-line" commanders, who had expressed to us privately that they were unsure what priority she would place on issues such as counterdrug operations.

¶10. (C) We realize that re-programming all of the planned \$4.3 million of FY2008 Merida Initiative support for Costa Rica to help make the SNGC operable and more effective is unlikely; however, the SNGC should receive as much assistance as possible as soon as possible to refurbish their fleet and purchase more interceptor vessels in order to conduct effective counterdrug interdiction mission. We stand ready to work with Washington colleagues to identify funding options for the SNGC.

¶11. (C) The planned amounts from Merida of \$1.975 million for FY2008 and \$3.8 million for FY2009 to fix the SNGC will do much to address maritime deficiencies. However, without sustained maintenance support and regular upgrades to the SNGC fleet, no amount of refurbished or new boats will address the need to maintain long-term interdiction capability in the strategic crossroads of the drug smuggling routes that Costa Rica occupies. Assigning Embassy San Jose a full-time maintenance liaison officer, similar to the officer assigned here during the USG-funded major expansion of the SNGC in 2000-2003, would be highly beneficial (as noted in our 2010 MSP). The SNGC is in dire need of strong

mid-level managers and leaders who can properly care and take ownership of their equipment. Increased funding to improve the SNGC's leadership and professionalization training would help ensure, and insure, the effectiveness of our counternarcotics investment in Costa Rica.

CIANCHETTE